



The Council of State Governments

CSG Healthy States National Task Force Civic Health Subcommittee

Summary of Meeting Two, Dec. 1 - 2, 2021

The second meeting of the CSG Healthy States National Task Force – Civic Health Subcommittee took place during The Council of State Governments 2021 National Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Wednesday, Dec. 1 and Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021. The subcommittee explored issues related to **misinformation and disinformation, election integrity and public trust in government institutions.**

“Communication in an Era of Disinformation” – Wednesday, Dec. 1

Civic Health Subcommittee Co-Chair **Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows** moderated a conversation with national task force member **New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver** and **Elena Cryst, assistant director of the Stanford Internet Observatory**, to discuss the increased necessity for having direct, transparent and data-informed conversations and for combatting disinformation and misinformation in the public sphere, particularly in the context of elections. A few highlights:

- Misinformation (inferring no intent to deceive) and disinformation (inferring the intent to deceive) are pervasive in part because people have a fundamental desire for salacious information. Media organizations and policymakers have an obligation to push back against the ability to feed this desire.
- State leaders can combat mis/disinformation by forming partnerships with social media companies to tag early bad information circulating online.
- Assistant Director Elena Cryst recommended state leaders have strong social media presences and that they post regularly, even outside of major events like elections, to build legitimacy and maintain a steady stream of reliable civic information. Assistant Director Cryst also recommended policymakers debunk, or at least address, bad information swiftly.
- Particular to the elections space, Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver recommended having full-time communications directors who respond around the clock to bad information posted on election systems housed within secretary of state offices.
- Secretary Toulouse Oliver also recommended policymakers communicate the process for dealing with election issues directly with the public through their own statements provided to local media.



- The secretary mentioned that it is important that voters know before an election that every election is unique, and mistakes do happen — not all votes are counted on election night and the mechanics behind election audits in case one becomes necessary.

Civic Health Subcommittee Work Session – Thursday, Dec. 2

Civic Health Subcommittee members met in a working session on the second day of the 2021 CSG National Conference to discuss the content covered during the “Communication in an Era of Disinformation” panel the previous day, brainstorm policy recommendations for increasing public trust and decreasing mis/disinformation and prepare a programming agenda for 2022. Key themes that emerged from that conversation include:

- The subcommittee recognized the need for elected officials and government appointees to take responsibility for their social media content and public messaging. They stressed that there needs to be more agreement among candidates for office that salacious posts made to generate excitement without being rooted in fact hurt election integrity and should be avoided.
- The subcommittee requested the next meeting include a historical account of past civic crises in America to add perspective to conversations around present-day solutions.
- The subcommittee also wants media representation in these conversations so the following question can be discussed: what role does the media play in the current civic crisis and what is their obligation to help provide a healthy civic state?

Civic Health Subcommittee Focuses

The Civic Health Subcommittee discussed ways the task force could focus its efforts to highlight policy data and state policy examples and consider recommendations for addressing misinformation and disinformation, including strengthening election integrity and public trust along the following focus areas:

- Establishment of a "Politics Code of Ethics" that encourages elected officials and candidates for office to lead by example and would create a baseline for how civic discourse operates within the public sphere.
- Establishment of a bi-partisan election integrity commission that meets behind closed doors to create a baseline for how elections are administered across states and how state leaders communicate election information to their constituencies.
- Further analysis into policy recommendations coming out of the June 2021 meeting in the following topical areas: responsiveness of public institutions, supporting local



civic bridge building capacity, inspiring commitment to American constitutional democracy and strengthening civic education.

Resources

Stanford Internet Observatory

- [Zero Trust: How to Secure American Elections When the Losers Won't Accept They Lost](#) (Report)
- [Election Official Handbook: Preparing for Election Day Misinformation](#) (Report)

Policy Examples Highlighted by Task Force Members, Partners and Staff

- **Colorado's** Clean Campaign Act of [2019](#) created more “paid for by” requirements in political advertising and banned campaign contributions from foreign countries, individuals or corporations. The act also requires the publication of the names of donors using state-level super Political Action Committees to make contributions.
- In **Indiana**, each public and nonpublic high school is required to provide a course that is not less than one year of school work and covers the historical, political, civic, sociological, economic and philosophical aspects of the constitutions of Indiana and the United States ([511 IAC 6-7-6.1.b](#), [IC 20-30-5-2](#), [IC 20-30-5-4](#)).
- While not a state policy example, members of the **American Association of Political Consultants** are required to sign a [Code of Ethics](#) annually. In this code of ethics, consultants pledge to use no appeal to voters which is based in racism, sexism, religious intolerance or any form of unlawful discrimination and refrain from false or misleading attacks on an opponent or member of their family, among other things. Candidates for public office and/or current state officials could adopt a similar code.



Civic Health Subcommittee

- Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, ME (co-chair)
- Secretary of State Frank La Rose, OH (co-chair)
- Sen. Jennifer Boysko, VA
- Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz, NY
- Sen. Sal DiDomenico, MA
- Senior Advisor Tommy Druen, KY
- Chief Service Officer Josh Fryday, CA
- Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea, RI
- Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson
- Sen. Joan Lovely, MA
- Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, IL
- Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, NM
- Justice Alisa Kelli Wise, AL

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